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# 6B

## Information/Action

### *Professional Services Committee*

## **Options for the Reading Instruction Competency Assessment (RICA) and California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) Contracts**

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**Executive Summary:** The purpose of this agenda item is to consider options for contracts for continued administration and development of the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) and the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST). Under the current contracts, the last administrations of these examinations will be held in June and July of 2006.

**Staff Direction:** Commission staff is seeking direction from the Commission in order to secure contracts to continue the development and administration of the RICA Examination and administration of the CBEST.

**Presenter:** Amy Jackson, Administrator; Professional Services Division

**Goal 1: Promote educational excellence through the preparation and certification of professional educators.**

- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the preparation of professional educators.
- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the performance of credential candidates.



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## **Options for the Reading Instruction Competency Assessment (RICA) and California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) Contracts**

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### **Introduction**

This report describes options for continued development and administration of the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) and the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST). The current contracts for both of these testing programs expire on October 31, 2006.

For the RICA, the agenda item presents the option of releasing a Request for Proposals (RFP) or amending the current contract. The RFP would solicit contractors to continue the administration of the, conduct test development and a standards setting study for the RICA. The current contract covers RICA administrations through July of 2006. The contract developed as a result of this RFP would extend from approximately March, 2006 to October, 2009 covering test administrations through July 2009. Beginning the contract in March allows the selected contractor to begin work on developing the resources and materials needed to administer the RICA beginning in August 2006. Issuing the contract through October, 2009 allows for final test administration reporting from the contractor. The contract would also include provisions for two one-year extensions beyond 2009 that would allow the Commission to consider the status of the RICA program and the contractor's performance in determining whether to continue the contract.

For the CBEST, the report describes a potential amendment to the contract for administration of the CBEST and presents the option of releasing of an RFP. The current CBEST contract with National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES) provides for administration of the CBEST through June of 2006. Recent and pending legislation and the Commission's study related to the CBEST may have an impact on the future of this testing program. Given the pending policy discussions, it may be more appropriate to extend the contract for one year rather than release an RFP for multiple years. This provides flexibility to the Commission and continuity to candidates until the legislative decision is reached.

Costs for the work required under these contracts would be recovered through examinee fees, as required by Education Code Section 44298. The RICA and CBEST contract options are described below.

## **Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA)**

California Education Code Sections 44283 and 44283.2 require that most California-trained candidates for initial Multiple Subject Teaching Credentials and Preliminary Level I Education Specialist Instruction Credentials pass the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA). By law, candidates can satisfy this requirement by passing either the RICA Written Examination or the RICA Video Performance Assessment (VPA). In October 1997, as a result of a competitive bidding process, the Commission approved a contract with National Evaluation Systems, Inc., for the development and administration of the RICA. The RICA was administered for the first time in June 1998. The current contract for administration of the RICA was again awarded to NES in 2001 through a competitive bidding process. Due to the work related to the Commission's exam efficiencies study, the contract was extended in 2004. The current contract covers test administrations through June of 2006 and will expire on October 31, 2006 to allow time for final administration and reporting activities required of the contractor.

For the RICA Written Examination, the first-time pass rate for the period from August 1999 to July 2004 was nearly 83% while the cumulative pass rate was just over 95%. For the RICA VPA, the first-time pass rate for the same period was 48% and the cumulative pass rate was approximately 53%. Over 50% of the candidates who take the RICA VPA previously failed the written examination.

### **Request for Proposals Related to the RICA**

The proposed RICA RFP would cover a three-year period, with the possibility of two one-year extensions, and call for a contractor to complete the following activities:

- Develop new test items for the RICA
- Conduct a standards setting study for the RICA
- Administer the RICA Written Examination and Video Performance Assessment through July, 2009

Each of the three activities is described below.

#### **1. Develop new test items for the RICA**

The proposed RFP would require the contractor to develop new test items to replace older items in the current RICA item bank. The contract would require that the new items be aligned with the California K-12 English-Language Arts Content Standards, the Reading and Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, and the Commission's Program Standards for Preparation to Teach Reading and Language Arts. In the spring of 2006, NES will conduct a validity study of the RICA test specifications. If the validity study results in changes to the test specifications, the proposed RFP would also require the contractor to develop new test items that align with the new specifications. This work would include:

- assisting the Commission in recruiting educators experienced in reading instruction to serve on a content advisory design team;

- developing new items;
- conducting meetings at which the design team will review items for content, accuracy, and alignment with test specifications;
- conducting meetings of the Commission's Bias Review Committee at which the members will review items to detect and eliminate potential bias or offensiveness;
- assisting Commission staff in working with the California Department of Education to ensure that items are aligned with the California K-12 English-Language Arts Content Standards and the Reading and Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools; and
- field-testing the items.

## **2. Conduct a standards setting study for the RICA**

Passing standards for the RICA examinations were established by the Commission in 1998 and have not been reviewed since that time. It has been Commission policy to periodically conduct standards setting studies for examinations to ensure that established passing scores reflect an appropriate level of competence. The proposed RFP will require the contractor to conduct a standards setting study. This work would include:

- developing a standards setting plan with staff;
- assisting the Commission in recruiting educators experienced in reading instruction to serve on a standards setting panel;
- conducting meetings with the standards setting panel to review examination materials, item data, and passing rate information so that the panel may provide input regarding the RICA passing standards;
- conducting statistical analyses of data collected at the meetings that the panel will use to develop recommendations to the Commission regarding RICA passing standards; and
- developing a report on the standards setting study.

Staff would present the results of the study, including recommendations from the standard setting panel, to the Commission for their consideration.

## **3. Administer the RICA Written Examination and Video Performance Assessment through July, 2009**

The proposed RFP would require the contractor to administer the RICA through July, 2009. Currently, the RICA Written Examination is administered six times annually in 18 areas across California, ranging from Arcata in the north to San Diego in the south. The RICA Video Performance Assessment is administered three times per year. The last administration of the RICA under this contract will be the July, 2009 submission of the RICA Video Performance Assessment.

Administration of the RICA involves the following types of contractor responsibilities:

- assuring the security of the testing process and materials;

- producing all program communications and materials;
- producing annual registration bulletins;
- identifying and securing testing sites;
- registering candidates;
- hiring and training test administrators;
- administering the test at multiple sites;
- providing alternative testing arrangements to candidates with verified disabilities;
- hiring and training scorers;
- scoring and reporting scores to candidates, colleges, universities, and the Commission; and
- producing reports.

## **California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST)**

The CBEST is administered by National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES) six times per year. The current contract with NES covers test administrations through June of 2006. In February 2005, Senator Jack Scott introduced Senate Bill 428 which proposes eliminating the CBEST requirement for certification. In August, after the bill had already passed the Assembly, the bill was considered by the Senate and the status was changed to a “two-year bill”. This would allow for further study of the issue and allows the legislature to reconsider this bill at any time through the summer of 2007.

Furthermore, at the request of the Commission, staff conducted a study during 2004-2005 to search for ways of streamlining the Commission’s examinations. The results of this study will be presented to the Commission at a future meeting and may lead to revisions to the structure of the CBEST.

Considering the uncertain status of CBEST, it would be impractical to release an RFP for multiple years of administration of the test. Releasing an RFP for only one year would also be impractical as it is unlikely that new contractors would be willing to take on a new testing program for this short period. Contractors who might be willing to bid for this contract would have higher start-up costs and would likely need to charge the Commission higher costs for its test administration services. For this reason, staff proposes seeking an amendment that would extend the current contract with NES for one year. This amendment would cover test administrations through June of 2007 at which time the status of the CBEST legislation and any results of the examination study will be much clearer.

## **Options for the Commission to Consider**

### **Options to Consider for the RICA Contract**

If the Commission approves the release of an RFP for the RICA, staff will release the RFP immediately and will return to the Commission in February, 2006 with the results of the proposal review. The contract developed as a result of this RFP would extend from approximately March, 2006 to October, 2009 covering test administrations through July 2009. Issuing the contract through October, 2009 allows for final test administration reporting from the contractor. In addition to the Commission, the contract would require the contractor’s agreement to the terms and final approval by the Department of General Services. Following are options related to the release of an RFP for the RICA:

- 1) Approve immediate release of an RFP for a contractor to administer the RICA, and conduct test development and standard setting studies for the RICA, from approximately March 2006 to October 2009 with the Commission’s option for two one-year extensions on the contract for administration of the RICA.
- 2) If the Commission chooses not to release an RFP for the RICA, staff asks that the Commission approve seeking an amendment to the current contract for one year.

This request to amend the current contract is being made at this time because postponing the release of an RFP to a later date would jeopardize the ability to conduct a competitive bidding and contracting process. Such a delay would leave the Commission without a contractor to administer the RICA for the established testing schedule for 2006-07.

### **Options to Consider for the CBEST Contract**

If the Commission approves seeking an amendment to the CBEST contract, staff will contact the contractor to discuss the contract extension. The contract developed as a result of this amendment would extend to October, 2007 covering test administrations from August 2006 through June 2007. Issuing the contract through October, 2007 allows for final test administration reporting from the contractor. Amendment of this contract will require final approval by the Department of General Services. Following are options related to amendment of the CBEST contract:

- 1) Approve seeking an extension of the CBEST contract with NES to administer the CBEST for one additional year from approximately August 2006 to June 2007. The contract would expire on October 31, 2007 to allow for final administration reporting from the contractor.
- 2) If the Commission chooses not to seek an extension of the CBEST contract, staff asks that the Commission approve releasing an RFP for administration of the CBEST for three years with the possibility of two one-year extensions. This request is being made because releasing an RFP at a later date would jeopardize the ability to conduct a competitive bidding and contracting process leaving the Commission without a contractor to administer the CBEST for the established testing schedule for 2006-07.